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Second Edition.]

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SERMON

ON

THE EXHIBITION

OF

Art and Industry of all Nations,

BY THE

REV. J. F. DENHAM, M.A., F.R.S.,

RECTOR OF ST. MARY-LE-STRAND,

LECTURER OF ST. BRIDE'S, FLEET STREET;

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

TO THE

INHABITANTS OF THE ABOVE PARISHES;

At the request of many of whom it is now Published;

AND NEARLY AS IT WAS DELIVERED IN THEIR CHURCHES.

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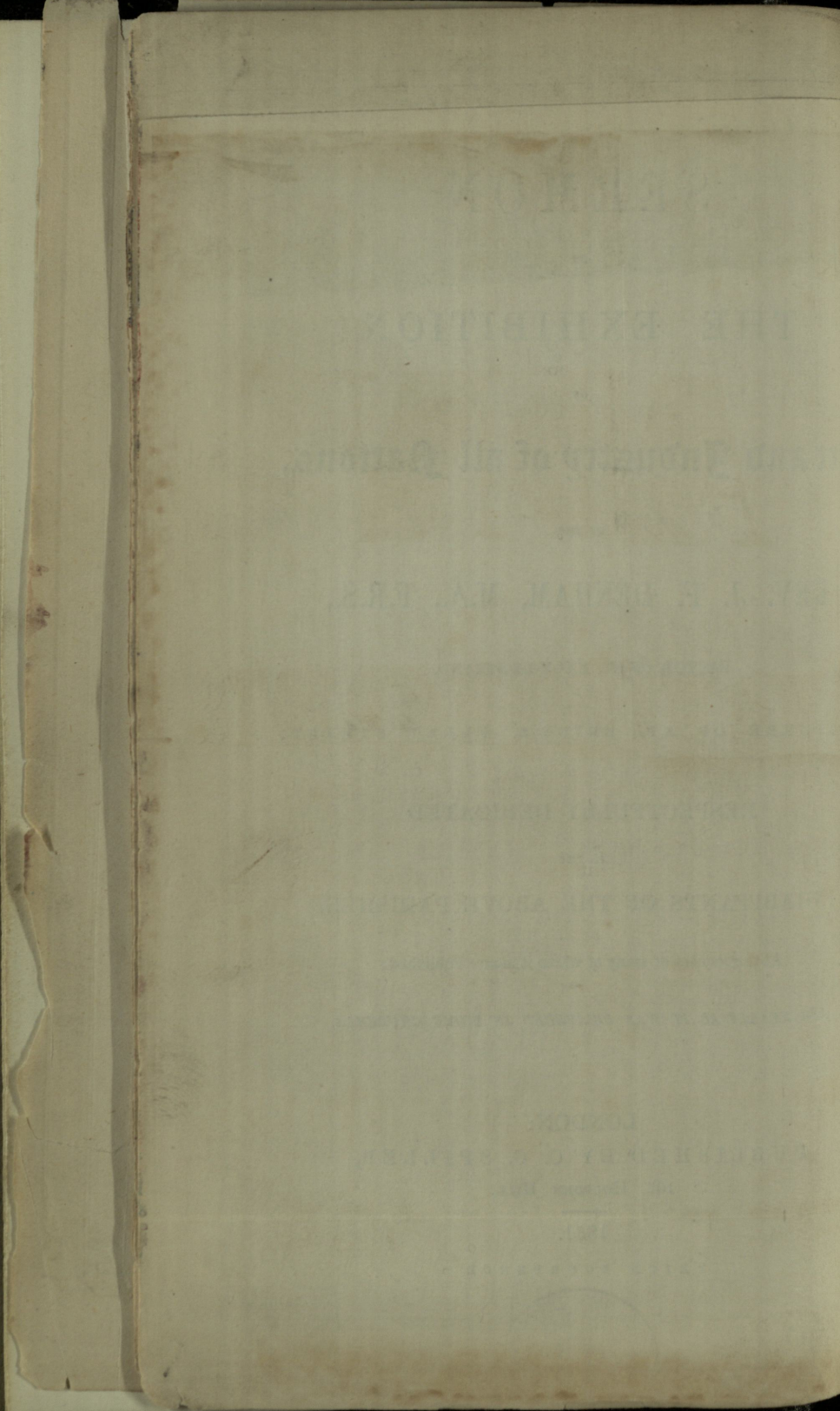
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A SERMON

ON THE

GREAT EXHIBITION,

BY THE

Rev. J. F. DENHAM,

M.A., F.R.S.,

Rector of St. Mary-le-Strand, & Evening Lecturer of St. Bride's, Fleet St.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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hanged their shields upon thy walls round about; they have made thy beauty perfect.

“Tarshish was thy merchant by reason of the multitude of all kind of riches; with silver, iron, tin, and lead, they traded in thy fairs.

“Javan, Tubal, and Meshech, they were thy merchants; they traded the persons of men and vessels of brass in thy market.

“They of the house of Togarmah traded in thy fairs with horses, and horsemen, and mules.

“The men of Dedan were thy merchants; many isles were the merchandise of thine hand: they brought thee for a present horns of ivory and ebony.

“Syria was thy merchant by reason of the multitude of the wares of thy making: they occupied in thy fairs with emeralds, purple, and broidered work, and fine linen, and coral, and agate.

“Judah, and the land of Israel, they were thy merchants: they traded in thy market wheat of Minnith and Pannag, and honey, and oil, and balm.

“Damascus was thy merchant in the multitude of the wares of thy making, for the multitude of all riches; in the wine of Helbon, and white wool.

“Dan also and Javan, going to and fro, occupied in thy fairs: bright iron, cassia, and calamus were in thy market.

“Dedan was thy merchant in precious clothes for chariots.

“Arabia, and all the princes of Kedar, they occupied with thee in lambs, and rams, and goats: in these were they thy merchants.

“The merchants of Sheba and Raamah, they were thy merchants: they occupied in thy fairs with chief of all spices, and with all precious stones, and gold.

“Haran, and Canneh, and Eden, the merchants of Sheba, Asshur, and Chilmad, were thy merchants.

“These were thy merchants in all sorts of things, in blue clothes of broidered work, and in chests of rich apparel, bound with cords, and made of cedar, among thy merchandise.

“The ships of Tarshish did sing of thee in thy market: and thou wast replenished, and made very glorious in the midst of the seas.”

My brethren, the reading of this description of the commercial resources and fairs of ancient Tyre, will have prepared you for the nature of the following observations. It has, you know, ever been deemed advisable for the ministers of religion to avail themselves of great public events as a means of more effectually inculcating moral and religious truths. Instruction on such occasions is called, in the native language of Scripture, "a word spoken upon the wheels,"* owing to the celerity and ease with which it makes its way to the heart. And I am persuaded that all present will consider the great public event of this period one of these occasions; for if ever the grandeur and pleasing nature of an incident can justify allusion to it in this place, then certainly *that* is such an occasion which, more than any other in the world's history, collects, and in our own country, visitors from every civilized nation of the earth, and engages the liveliest sympathies of every wellwisher of mankind.

Although, however, the Exhibition of the Art and Industry of all Nations in this metropolis is without a parallel in the history of the world, it is not, as you observe from our text, entirely without some resemblance in the "fairs," as they are called, anciently held in the city of Tyre, situate on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea; and to which nearly all the nations of the East contributed their competitions in merchandise. There is, however, this great difference between the two cases, that civilization was then only sparingly diffused; for not only this country, but nearly the whole continent of Europe, at the time of the Tyrian fairs, was removed only a few degrees above the lowest barbarism; and furthermore, the light of science was then, as compared with our times, both dim and partial; while the application of science to the arts, neither then nor in any other age, admitted of a comparison with it in our own. Never, too, were the facilities of international communication so great as in the present day; when mankind converse with each other by means of the lightning-flash, wait not for the tides of ocean, and even dispense with the winds of heaven.

The event, indeed, is sufficiently understood and appreciated by us all to render serviceable reflections upon it, of a moral

* Prov. xxv. 11, *margin*.

and religious nature, of which the enlightened and christian mind will universally think it worthy. The foremost among these which occurs to my own mind, is the pleasing *contrast afforded by the objects now associated in the locality of this great national spectacle.*

On one hand you there behold the awkward and repulsive monuments of military victories and of martial preparations, which nothing but a dire necessity could justify: on the other hand you behold the trophies of those arts which grow up only in a state of peace, and are among its most glorious ornaments and rewards. We are thus reminded of those long and disastrous wars which kept the nations of the earth asunder, and of those better councils, or, at least, circumstances, which admit of the union of nations for the nobler purposes of displaying and improving the means of rendering human life happy and desirable. And pleasing, too, was the contrast, that the military music, which once inspirited warriors to the contest or concealed their dying groans, should, on this occasion, have been employed in subdued and joyful strains in ushering in the universal banquet of amity and intelligence. Compared, too, with the purposes of that building, how grim and unsightly seem the neighbouring barracks of the soldiery! Compared with the varied costume of that assembly, how absurd is the pantomime of regimentals! Compared with that unanimous concourse, how melancholy the spectacle of warlike array, and of men trained to march and to manœuvre for the purposes of human destruction! What a proof does this event afford us that mankind are at least capable of concord for the noblest purposes! What a lively specimen does it afford of the predicted period when "the nations of the earth shall not learn war any more!" Isaiah ii. 4. My brethren, we have most of us witnessed public events which add but little pleasure to our recollections; but any man, in these days, may congratulate himself that he has lived to see one event which repays his whole experience of human life, and which raises his estimation of himself and his species, and his confidence in it, above the possibility of a suspicion. If any man should doubt the ameliorating influence of science and civilization on the dispositions and welfare of mankind, I point him to the locality of the

National Exhibition at this moment, and to the far different purposes to which that locality was once devoted, but to which, under the auspices of diffused intelligence, it never, I believe, will again be applied. Old men inform us that in the reign of George III. not a single blade of grass could grow in Hyde Park, which, owing to the constant footsteps of the soldiery training for warfare, was as dry and barren as the high road. In our day its verdure will be depressed for a time only, and by peaceful groups of those very nations whose forefathers shared and suffered in those disastrous conflicts. In order, however, to give our observations on this happy event a definite and useful turn, I would observe—

Secondly, upon the National Exhibition as a specimen of the *benevolent tendency of what are usually called the self-interested passions of mankind*. I am quite willing to allow that self-interest in some or other form originated the idea, and contributed to the accomplishment of the result. Say, for instance, that individual interests suggested the plan, gave to it its thrilling and instantaneous reception, actuated the mind of every master and the arm of every workman engaged in rearing that magic structure, although it is impossible but that many superior motives were awakened by its progress. But even on the lowest supposition, I see something creditable to human nature, or, I should rather say, redounding to the glory of the Author of our nature, who has so constituted us that we can never seek our own wellbeing except by means which promote that of others; and every kind and good heart rejoices when it contemplates the employment given to thousands and even millions of the human race by a project which, however it might originate in personal or local interests, could not be accomplished but by a diffusion of general good. It is ever thus with all the aims and views of man. He cannot carry his own purposes into effect without, in some or other way, benefiting his fellow-creatures. Even the most selfish emotions tend to augment public welfare; individual purposes are overruled for social prosperity, and from private sources universal advantage flows. What a delightful reflection!—how does it tend to exalt our ideas of the benevolence of the Almighty, who has so constituted us that the welfare of some should involve the welfare of

all. This is true on the lowest supposition, and on the ground of mere pecuniary interest; but we further assert, that no man can indulge even his own patriotism or philanthropy, or his love of moral glory, without diffusing a similar spirit into the minds of multitudes of his fellow-men: so that, in the words of an eminent writer (Dr. Thomas Brown), "self-love is only another word for the diffusion of love."

A third reflection I would offer is as to *the illustration now afforded us of the social capacity of human nature.*

My brethren, we are apt to complain of the unsociable and unfriendly character of man, to say that he is wholly a selfish being, whose nature is to monopolize his satisfactions, and to begrudge a share in them to his fellow-creatures. We are apt to say, that man's nature does not even admit of his taking an interest in general views, and that man is the slave of local associations; but the event which fills our attention at the present season clearly shows that there is something in our nature superior to topical influences, that there is a tendency towards unity in the human species, and that the real fault is that man so seldom finds an occasion and an opportunity for feeling and cherishing that moral assimilation of which he is capable, and by which, under wise management, he might attain to the noblest purposes of his creation. It has, we know, been held that men of different races are natural enemies; that mankind are instinctively influenced by a difference of complexion; that a strange language makes man a stranger to his fellow-man; but the aspect of the metropolis at this moment, and the feeling that pervades it, refute these suspicions, and show that, if you could but give to man a great and worthy object, he is capable all over the globe of uniting in one common pursuit; and it is lawful as well as delightful to conceive of what high use this social faculty in man may be made in the hands of Omnipotence whenever any grand, moral, or spiritual objects shall be presented to the common mind: for it is not too much to say, as the history of even the Crusades fully proves, that the family of man is equally capable of united action for purposes of a moral and even a religious nature. What an animating prospect does this thought present to our view! for it is plainly within the compass of human expectations that in some coming

age mankind may evince as much general interest in some far higher object, as this object is higher and better than any which has heretofore occupied the general attention. Nor may we repress the humble yet confident expectation that this event may be the herald of some such nobler object. It would not be the first time that religion has followed in the track of commerce; for as a great modern English writer observes (Robert Hall), "religion is a fruit which ever blossoms, and grows upon the highest and most palmy branches of civilization." May we not hope that, just as men and neighbours, so countries and nations, may learn to love each other better, the more truly they understand each other's character; and that "the peoples, nations, and languages" now assembled to view each other's commercial achievements, may separate with kindlier sentiments towards each other's religious distinctions; and that as science has now fused all outward diversities, so charity, the great and universal law of religion, may soften, even if it blend not in harmony, all the theological. My brethren, those are most apt to blame human nature who least understand its construction or how to treat it. I believe that it is possible for a wiser way to be adopted which shall tend to realize that great hope of religion and philosophy, "the unity of the human race." I believe, too, that, come whenever it may, that event will be brought about by the universal diffusion of "knowledge and wisdom," for we all know that in the prophecy of the Messiah's future kingdom "the running to and fro of knowledge" is represented as its precursor, and under which kingdom "nation shall not lift up sword against nation," but the long-lost brotherhood of mankind shall be universally restored—a brotherhood of which the event to which public attention is now turned, fully proves man to be capable, and of which it may be an anticipatory specimen.

I fourthly observe upon *the exemplification afforded by this event of the emulative or imitative capacity of man, and its benevolent tendency.*

The whole civilized world presents at this moment the sublime aspect of the most intense competition: to excel is the object of every kingdom—to vie with each other, the ambition of all nations; and this fact affords another proof that the hu-

man race at large is capable of the emulation of excellence. Nor do I think it possible to overestimate the good results in all departments which will follow from the present competition. It is not too much to say, that the nation or even individual does not exist whose physical and even moral position will not be reached and improved by the present movement. As it is demonstrable, though not conceivable, that every ship that is launched upon the ocean raises the altitude of the waters of the whole globe, so it is certain that an impression will thrill through the existence of the human race from the central impetus now given to it by the National Exhibition; that the good effects, consequently, of this event will not terminate with the occasion or locality, but that a new and better order of things will be produced by it, and go on advancing to the end of time. Nor is the expectation, perhaps, too sanguine that this event may be the means employed by Infinite Wisdom for introducing another of those great developments of Its providential government depicted in the pages of prophecy, and for which the human mind has so long, so effectively, and by so many ways been preparing. The glow of emulation, once kindled, will extend to objects besides those of commerce, and will burn till many a long-cherished but antisocial prejudice shall have been consumed. Man will learn to recognise only valuable principles, and to pursue only his substantial welfare. It will be seen that nations have been the victims of mutual mistake and folly; and though not all at once, yet I trust ultimately, the only true and general religion will from this event "have free course, run, and be glorified"—the religion of piety and virtue towards God, and of goodwill among mankind. For as the old and clumsy inventions in art and science will now go out of use and fashion upon a comparison with new and better, so I cannot doubt, that the nations of the world will be led, from their present intercourse with each other, to prize less highly those antiquated prejudices which have so long diverted their attention from substantial good in religion, government, and morals. My brethren, there is nothing more improving to the spirit of man than a visit to other countries, for it teaches him that good is to be found everywhere: and there is nothing so likely to promote a general improvement and enlightenment

as the friendly communion of nations, by which they will all see something in themselves to correct, and something in each other to admire.

We may, fifthly, take occasion from this international display of improvements in art and science to indulge *a pleasing view of the unlimited capabilities of the human mind.*

Within the walls of the receptacle of the art and industry of all nations, we behold a specimen of what man can do, as compared with the well-known low original of all nations of the earth. Only compare the aspect and contents of the metropolis this day with the condition of a savage nation; or with the condition of our own nation two thousand, and even two hundred years ago; and then say whether any one can set bounds to the possible progress of the mind of man. How clearly, too, does this Exhibition show the superiority of man over the most highly gifted of the brute creation, which though enabled by instinct to adopt some resources for their immediate convenience, never exhibit the slightest capacity of discovery, and seem utterly unable to imitate our improvements. What an illustrious proof does the International Exhibition afford, therefore, of the natural superiority of man over every earthly creature! And further, that man, collectively, is also capable of vast moral improvement is clear from another interesting fact, that, amid all the diversified objects in that immense collection, there is but a very small proportion of warlike weapons. Every science there presents its achievements in profusion, except the science of war: every machine displays abundant improvements except machines for mutual destruction. Does not this fact show that man is not only *capable* of vast moral improvement, but that he has actually made it? Go, ye whose drooping minds can see nothing but what is evil and hateful in human nature—go, and as you gaze, with pining heart and sullen eye, upon that repository of human resources, behold, in the comparative absence of the traces of destructiveness, an evidence that man is not by nature a brute or a demon, and that it is within the influence of science, when sanctified by religion, to divest man's nature of all its incidental ruggedness, and to restore it somewhat near to its original perfection and to its promised glory. Nor can we omit the reflection on the absurdity of supposing, that beings

like men who have co-operated in this mighty development of their powers, are intended by Infinite Wisdom to live only in the present world, and then to bury all these energies for ever in the grave. No, my brethren: in all the works of man, and in this, the collective representation of them all, you behold faculties whose greatness is the pledge and index of their own immortality.

Sixthly, another reflection, suggested by this display of human industry, relates to *the infinite superiority of the works of God over the most consummate productions of human skill.*

To evince this superiority, I need but remark, that the most perfect specimens of human art are generally mere humble imitations of what we call the works of nature, and yet, even when most beautiful and complete, do not admit of a comparison with them. The best specimens, for instance, of human cutlery, when viewed through a microscope, present only so many bars of rugged iron; while the sting of a bee, or the wing of a fly, exhibits a proportion of polish and workmanship, as if, to use Paley's language, "the Creator had nothing else to finish!" Yet, alas! my brethren, if we were inclined to adopt a mournful reflection, we might find cause for it in the comparative inattention with which the works of the divine Artificer are regarded beside the works of our fellow-creatures. Yet all the active hands, and all the ingenious minds, which have contributed to the Great Exhibition, could not frame a worm, or make a blade of grass. How shall we account for this disregard of those works which are the truest and greatest wonders? Shall we say, that it is the fault of education, which has lamentably, on every account, besides that of religion and piety, omitted the study of those works? Then let parents and teachers be careful to remedy this defect in the tuition of children. Shall we say, that our familiarity with the divine works diminishes our interest in them? Then I reply, that it is the office of religion, and ought to be its constant exercise, to correct that indifference, and to counteract that familiarity. Shall we say, that it is the infirmity of man to be chiefly influenced by effects, rather than to trace causes? Then ought he to surmount this infirmity by the exertion of his discursive faculties. Perhaps the occasion which prompts these reflections

may serve to show both the greatness and the too possible blindness of man. But let us charitably hope, that the same suggestion has already presented itself to more minds than we can have any opportunity of knowing. Let us not yield to the delusion of supposing that we are the only well-disposed observers of the scene. All the spectators of it believe, also, in the existence and attributes of God; and we shall not err, perhaps, if we think that the majority of them are as truly inclined to honour their Creator as ourselves. We may do wisely, as well as charitably, by cherishing this hope, lest haply it should be found that, while like Abraham in the court of Abimelech we are ready to think "Surely the fear of God is not in this place," and whose suspicions betrayed him into the sin of prevarication, there may exist more piety even where we least expect it, than possibly exists at the same moment in the bosom of the despondent.—Gen. xx. 11, 16.

Another reflection suggested by the subject is, as to the *possibly infinite variety of objects which may be subjected to the inspection of man hereafter in the divine kingdom of immensity and eternity.*

One impression seems to pervade the mind of every spectator, that the multiplicity and complexity of objects in this International Exhibition overwhelm the understanding, however enlightened, enlarged, and cultivated; and yet this collection of objects diminishes into absolute insignificance when viewed beside the diversity of objects even in the visible creation—the creatures inhabiting, or the objects furnishing, the air, the earth, and the ocean. One simple fact will place this idea in the light I wish, and which is well known most likely to all present; that there are more creatures inhabiting the waters adjacent to the Exhibition than will visit or even exist in the metropolis during the whole summer by many hundred, perhaps thousand, fold. And yet, the entire visible creation is only a speck, a grain of sand, in the aggregate of the material universe; and to which we must add the intellectual creation, consisting of angelic beings, its widely different and superior laws; and the still more transcendent laws which regulate the moral universe. How inconceivable, then, and adorable must be the Divine Intelligence, of which the whole material universe,

and all the works of man, and all the orders of angels, are but so many scintillations of greater or lesser magnitude and brilliancy, issuing from Him as from an eternal and ever active Centre of power, wisdom, and goodness, enlightening, adorning, and beatifying all the endless realms of nature, and from everlasting to everlasting! My brethren, what a glorious privilege is existence, and especially the existence of rational beings, and under the dominion and relationship of the God and Father of all! How full of hope and consolation is the reflection, that "this God is our God for ever and ever"—"the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ"—the author of the Gospel, with all its resources of grace to help the diligent, and of mercy to pardon the penitent, and which is pre-eminently "the wisdom and the power of God," and the source and means of incomparably greater glory to Him, and of happiness to His creatures, than all the magnificence and goodness displayed in the external creation: and that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. 1 Cor. 2, 9.

I may add another and most solemn reflection, that as in this Exhibition each individual spectator will seek kindred objects to his own taste, and will find gratification in them only, so the same law will attend the human mind, and determine its happiness hereafter and for ever.

The Exhibition will afford, like every other object, a test of inward character. The sensual and unintellectual will not care to see it, or, at most, will wander through it with mere bewilderment of mind; and all who visit it will take an interest in those objects only which their minds affect, or to which they are, by disposition and taste, inclined. Hence, if we could see into each spectator's choice of objects, we should also see into his turn of mind, and discern his prevailing mental character. How important is it that this mental taste in man should be adapted to the best, most enduring, most satisfactory, and excellent objects; for it is both evident and certain, that in a future state every man's happiness will depend on the moral taste which he acquires in the present life. Thus, a sensual, an unintellectual, or an immoral mind would be unhappy and desolate even amid heaven's happiness.

The holiness, the moral felicity of heaven would render it a hell to such a mind; and in hell itself it will find no objects suitable to its taste—nothing but privation and misery! How fearful, then, is the prospect of the sinner and the ungodly! There the worldling shall still retain his dependence for happiness on those worldly things which he shall never again enjoy. The avaricious will still thirst for gold, but shall find not an atom of it to give him a moment's alleviation. The ambitious man shall still burn with his wonted passion for superiority—now converted into torture by the absence of all that could gratify it. The operation of this law of tastes and habits shall be felt as certainly, and yet with inconceivably greater keenness, than we could imagine it to do in the case of a transgressor of human laws in this world, and who should be suddenly dragged from splendours and luxuries, and compelled to submit to all the coarseness, degradations, and neglect of the prison or of the penal settlement. On the contrary, the same law of mental tastes and habits will contribute to the increased enjoyment of the wise and good, when they shall find themselves, at death, introduced into an unlimited participation in the pursuits and objects most congenial to their holy dispositions. How full of warning, however, is the fact, that this inward taste, which is to be the instrument of our future happiness or woe, is being formed in us day by day, and by every pursuit in which we voluntarily engage, and by every thought and feeling which we voluntarily cherish. But the subject has already detained you long. My wish to improve it will have been accomplished if it shall have set in action in your own minds other reflections which may tend to raise our gratitude to God; to induce goodwill towards man; to lead us daily to appreciate, more and more, the value of our nature; and above all things, to live to those purposes by which we may fulfil the intention of our being, which will bring happiness now and hereafter to ourselves, and glory to our infinitely adorable and blessed Creator: to whom, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be glory, praise, honour, thanksgiving, and dominion for ever.

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